

Take a trip five miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and discover what much of the continental United States looked like once upon a time. The Bald Hills is a little known wide tapestry of grasslands. Unlike the flat expanses of the Great Plains, these prairies rise from 250 feet to 3,100 feet, their rolling ridgelines dappled with 300-year-old white oaks, symbols of open space and time. Visit any season and discover a diversity of plants, birds, and animals unmatched in the redwood forest.

In spring, four-foot-tall fescue and oatgrass cover 2,000 acres and attract Roosevelt elk, deer, and fox. Even black bears, ravenous after a winter of napping in the cavities of redwood stumps, leave the forest to feed on grasses.

April through May, wildflowers—baby blue eyes, bush lupine, and checker lily—dot the expanse. Early blooming shooting stars point to the sky and find in the lateral spread of Oregon white oaks much needed moisture and shade. The oaks fill out with broad, lobed leaves that will add patches of deep green to the hills. The resounding knocks of chisel-billed acorn woodpeckers splinter the prairie's solitude as they search for insects in the oaks' ashen, fissured bark.

The patchwork of grasslands and oak woodlands stretches along the ridgecrest that separates the Klamath River and Redwood Creek drainages, with bays, black oaks, big-leafed maples, and young forests of Douglas-fir bordering the woodlands. Redwoods grow downslope and by the waterways. Bobcats, raccoons, and coyotes find cover in the forests and food in the grasses. By June, golden California poppies, red maids, and harvest brodiaea produce an explosion of color. The flowers and grasses attract more than 5,000 insect species.

THE BALD HILLS

Secret Spaces

By Lynne Mager



Spring arrives for Roosevelt elk on the slopes of the Bald Hills.

As summer temperatures soar above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the landscape turns amber. This might make it hard for a human to spy buff-colored coyotes but it doesn't hamper the coyotes' hunting capabilities and neither does the topography. The lumpy terrain has been likened to "amphitheater-shaped relief." Mudslides occur under this surface of clay and

sandstone. Hidden in those lumps are plenty of rodents, snakes, and brush rabbits. They don't escape the nose of the coyote or the krypton vision of the red-tailed hawk, circling high and wide before the dive. Its high-pitched *keer-r-r* belongs in far-reaching spaces. California quail, flickers, and a variety of owls also live in the high hills.

Autumn is a busy time. A thousand-pound Roosevelt elk bugles for his harem, creating unrivaled music on the prairie. Roosevelt elk cows and bulls come together only during fall mating time.

Acorns ripen and provide essential nutrients for most life across the windy land. Jays and squirrels cache thousands of acorns in the ground but don't retrieve them all, allowing the protected nuts to sprout and ensuring a circle of survival.

The oaks have changed from golden to rust-colored canopies. Chilly nights trigger nutrients to go back into the trunk and roots, stored until next spring.

Winter pelts the rolling countryside with about 60 inches of rain, but brings little snow. Shawls of lichens drape bare oak limbs; blue jays, red-breasted sapsuckers, and kestrels return; the flutelike note of the meadowlark's song penetrates the mist. The dusky-footed wood rat retreats to the forest to build its nest atop a redwood stump, only to have it stolen by the black bear making a bed inside.

Visit this secret space of prairies and oak woodlands inhabited by a cornucopia of plants and animals that live—not once upon a time—but today.





The Bald Hills

For thousands of years people have used the resources of the Bald Hills—the grasslands and the oak woodlands. Expansive vistas always beckon the human spirit, and the Bald Hills provides an enticing panorama of human history. Listen closely to the gentle breezes; you will hear the whispers of acorn gatherers, dancers, explorers, miners, merchants, ranchers, and loggers mingling with your own voice. Come explore!

THE CHILULA: BALD HILLS PEOPLE

Minnie Reeves, Chilula elder and spiritual leader, was taught that her people “came out of a large hollow redwood tree when the world was first created.” Her descendants, who live on the Hoopa Valley Reservation today, came from the village Noledin, the Chilula “center of the world,” which is located within the boundaries of Redwood National and State Parks. They lived on the most intimate terms with the redwood forest and became known to settlers as the Redwood Creek Indians.

Until their removal to Hoopa Valley in the 1860s, the Chilula, a small tribe, inhabited the middle reaches of Redwood Creek valley. They used split planks from redwood trees to build rectangular, semi-subterranean houses. They also

used hollow redwoods as emergency shelters and campsites. They fished for salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, candlefish, and lamprey eels at the *nole* or waterfall below the village of Noledin.

In summer the people left the redwood valley to live in the grassy Bald Hills, collecting seeds and bulbs and hunting deer and elk. As autumn approached, they harvested acorns in the Bald Hills or crossed Redwood Creek to gather tanoak acorns.

The Chilula never strayed far from the sacred redwood trees. Minnie Reeves expressed it best when asked about her people’s creation story. “Destroy these trees and you destroy the Creator’s love. And if you destroy that which the Creator loves so much, you will eventually destroy mankind.”

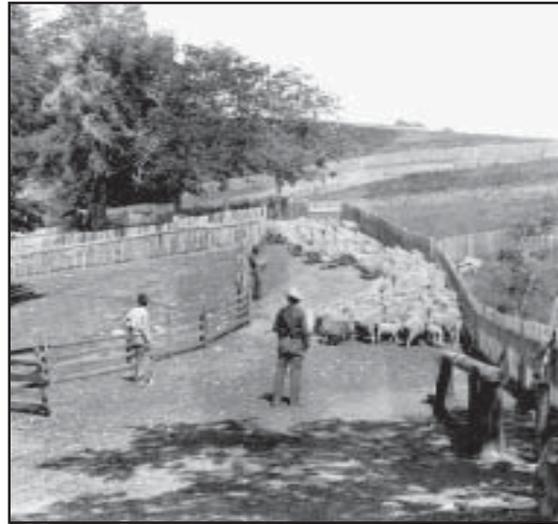
“The redwood trees . . . are a special gift and reminder from the Great Creator to the human beings. The Great Creator . . . wanted to leave a special gift for his children. So he took a little medicine from each tree, he said a prayer and sang a powerful song, and then he mixed it all with the blood of our people. Then he created this special redwood tree . . . He left it on Earth as a demonstration of his love for his children.”

—MINNIE REEVES, 1981

Each evening, an undulating line of rumpling white backsides stretched across the rolling hills as the sheep meandered back to Jonathan Lyons' barn at the "Home Place." Stand in the hand-hewn barn today and you can imagine the Lyons' pioneer life.

Born in Indiana and raised in Iowa, Lyons was lured west during the Gold Rush. Always the entrepreneur, he saw opportunity as a butcher. He would sling a beef carcass on either side of his mule and haul them to miners' camps on the Klamath and Salmon Rivers. In the 1860s, he settled in the Bald Hills with his Hupa/Karuk wife, Amelia, and raised cattle for a number of years. In 1873 he drove 900 fine-wool Merinos over the mountains, moving onto the moneymaker of the time: sheep ranching. Other settlers followed suit. By the turn of the

Lyons' Way



Jonathan Lyons introduced sheep ranching to Northern Humboldt county, shaping settlement and agricultural practices.

century, 5,000 sheep browsed the Bald Hills, producing as much as 40,000 pounds of wool annually. The wool was said to be "the finest grown anywhere in the United States."

Life on the ranch was a blend of culture and cultural practices. The wives of Lyons and three of his sons were Indian. Lyons employed mostly Chilula and Hupa ranch hands to shear the sheep, train horses, build fences, and hunt for predators. They continued the Indian tradition of burning the prairies to promote new growth and increase fodder.

The Lyons family dominated the Bald Hills until the 1960s, when the land was sold for its timber. Now a part of Redwood National and State Parks, the orchard trees, grapevines, barn, bunkhouse, and family cemetery at the "Home Place" tell a story of one family's survival.

Seasonal Flowers



Left to right: baby blue eyes, checker lily, bush lupine, harvest brodiaea, California poppy, red maids

HEALING THE LANDSCAPE

by Cathleen Cook

I can no longer discern where the gravel road snaked across the hillside. Instead, a rolling grassland edged by the dark evergreen of Douglas-fir meets me. My tensions from the week ease in the openness that surrounds me. Odd how a place so recently altered by human activities can bring such solace, but then healing comes from understanding the symptoms, causes, and cures. This landscape has much to teach about the process of healing.

Less than 25 years ago, a modern-day logging road as well as secondary roads etched the undulating grassland of Elk Camp Prairie where I now stand. This prairie was just one piece of the 48,000 acres acquired by the National Park Service in 1978 to protect redwoods growing along Redwood Creek and to create a more cohesive park. Timber had been cut on most of these acres; the land was incised by logging skid roads and pocked by quarries and borrow pits. The stripped, unstable slopes led to landslides during storms, filling the watershed with sediment and mud.

Funds to implement a restoration program came with the park expansion. Nineteen years ago road removal began at Elk Camp Prairie. The sounds of excavators and bulldozers filled the air as workers labored to remove road fill, reconstruct hillsides, and rejuvenate the native grassland.

Today, the physical scars on this prairie are gone and in many other locations the park landscape transformed. More than 200 miles of logging roads have been eliminated and healthy stands of young trees and shrubs cover formerly disturbed sites. Park staff continues to mend the landscape by removing more roads, eradicating exotic plants, thinning second-growth forests, and using controlled burning to maintain prairies and oak woodlands.

Still it will take many more years for this redwood ecosystem to truly recover. Healing takes time and understanding.



Before and after restoration shots.



FIRE: Friend or Foe

By Susan Calla

On cool and windless autumn days, you may see columns of smoke rising from prairies in the Bald Hills. Wildfire evokes images of uncontrolled destruction for most people, so the smoke may cause alarm. However, in recent times scientists have realized that fire plays a vital role in helping maintain healthy and diverse forest ecosystems.

Historically, every 75 to 300 years lightning causes low burning ground fires along the redwood coast. They incinerate the thick understory of smaller or diseased trees without harming the redwoods. The newly opened forest floor provides a nutritious nursery bed for seeds that would not have survived under the deep brush and fountains of ferns.

The burning of forests and grasslands defines a complex relationship that humans have had with fire and our environment for eons. Farmers use fire to burn the residue of crops or to clear brush. For American Indians of the redwood region, burning kept the high grassy prairies and oak woodlands free from the encroachment of forests. The



Fall burns are carefully timed to take advantage of cured grass and the onset of the rainy season.

verdant spring grasses that rose from the ashes were a magnet for herds of elk and deer. The fires stimulated the growth of acorns, hazelnuts, berries, and other vegetation that provided food as well as materials for baskets, nets, and string.

Park officials recognize the benefits and importance of controlled fire as a tool. The parks' prescribed burn policy is intended to preserve cultural landscapes in the same

manner that they were maintained before we began suppressing fire a century ago.

Each season of smoke provides us with the opportunity to witness what is a unique blending of this nation's natural and cultural heritage. It represents a glowing reminder of just one of the ways in which indigenous people managed successfully and sustainably to interact with their environment for thousands of years.

Bald Hills Road Auto Tour

by Susan Davis

Bald Hills Road is located 1/2 mile north of Orick, trailers and motorhomes not recommended.

MILEPOST 0.3 ORICK MILL The region's only remaining old-growth lumber operation handles redwood only. Fifty years ago, there were 200 mills within a 100-mile radius.

0.4 REDWOOD CREEK PICNIC AREA/TRAILHEAD Bustling lumber mill site in the 1940s. Today the creekside site offers a quiet picnic area. Redwood Creek Trail follows the creek for eight miles to the Tall Trees Grove (seasonal bridges in the summer; high water in the winter).

2.7 LADY BIRD JOHNSON GROVE The First Lady dedicated Redwood National Park at this site in 1968. This easy 1-mile loop meanders through diverse ridgetop redwood forest. A remnant of the first wagon road through this area is on the left just before the bridge. The old path will parallel Bald Hills Road for the next 10 miles.

4.9 GANNS PRAIRIE When explorer Jedediah Smith camped here in 1828, the prairie spread

over more than 80 acres. Today the prairie, which was also used to graze sheep, raise oats, and quarry rock, is being replaced by Douglas-fir forest.

6.3 LOST MAN CREEK HIKE/BIKE TRAIL An 11-mile bicycle trail traverses the ridgeline through adolescent conifers before descending into Lost Man Creek valley.

6.7 REDWOOD CREEK OVERLOOK At an elevation of 2,100 feet. Picnic tables, restroom, panoramic views, educational exhibits on the Redwood Creek watershed.

7.1 TALL TREES ACCESS ROAD Gate access, permit required (free), obtain from park visitor centers in Orick or Crescent City. Six-mile road to Tall Trees Grove Trail, a steep climb down 1 1/2 miles. Thousands of pack-mules carrying supplies for inland gold mines ascended into Bald Hills from Tall Trees area in the 1800s.

9.0 ELK CAMP PRAIRIE Excellent example of park restoration. See article "Healing the Landscape."

11.4 DOLASON PRAIRIE Picnic tables, restrooms, Dolason Prairie Trail. The trail crosses meadows and drops into old-growth forest, 4 1/2 miles one way. Hike about a mile to Dolason barn, named after 1860s rancher James Donaldson whose name was corrupted over time.

12.2 COUNTS HILL PRAIRIE/AIRSTRIP PRAIRIE Graded and used as an airplane runway from the 1940s to the 1960s.

13.8 CHILDS HILL PRAIRIE The first sightings of expansive Oregon white oak woodlands.

14.6 TOMLINSON RANCH The private ranch on the left long served as a stagecoach stop. Built in 1919, the 18-room main house boasted a 10-foot cookstove on which 24 hotcakes could be cooked at one time.

17.0 LYONS RANCH HISTORIC SITE Two-mile easy walk to the "Home Place" the residence of the patriarch of the Lyons family. Three generations of Lyons lived on four separate ranches in the Bald Hills, with all residences connected by a 10-mile private telephone line.

17.7 LONG RIDGE SHEEPSHED One-mile walk past the gate to a fine example of American folk architecture; continue 1/2 mile to Coyote Creek Barn.

18.0 SCHOOLHOUSE PEAK FIRE LOOKOUT An invigorating 1/2-mile walk up to the Lookout, elevation 3,097 feet, and to a full-circle panorama of the Bald Hills. The present structure dates to 1960 and houses an innovative solar-and-hydrogen-gas-fuel-cell-powered microwave transmitter that provides telephone service relay to remote villages deep in the Klamath River valley.

18.7 ACCESS TO COYOTE PEAK Walk down the gated road and along the flanks of the tallest point in the parks. For at least 4,500 years native people have considered sites along these rocky ridges sacred.

19.0 PARK BOUNDARY From here Bald Hills Road leads eastward into the Klamath River watershed. This 20-mile drive goes to Highway 169. Use Highway 96 and Highway 299 to connect to Highway 101.